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C O R R E C T I V E C O P Y (SENSITIVE CAPTION ADDED)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [IR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE REQUEST ON ARRESTED IRANIAN-AMERICAN
ACADEMIC HALEH ESFANDIARI

11. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: The Department requests that post ask the GOJ to engage the Iranian government on the case of Iranian-American academic Haleh Esfandiari, Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. Dr. Esfandiari was arrested by Iranian authorities in Tehran on May 8 and is being held in Iran's notorious Evin Prison. The Department understands that former Deputy Under Secretary of State Strobe Talbott raised Esfandiari's case with LDP officials in Tokyo on May 17, and that he plans to raise the issue again with PM Abe on May 18. The Department supports Talbott's request for GOJ assistance and requests that post pass the following background information to the MOFA for their use in prepping PM Abe and for engaging the Iranians on our behalf.

12. (U) BACKGROUND: Dr. Esfandiari went to Tehran in late December 2006 to visit her 93-year old mother. On December 30, on her way to the airport to return to Washington, the taxi in which Dr. Esfandiari was riding was stopped by three masked, knife-wielding men, who took her baggage and handbag, including her Iranian and U.S. passports.

-- Four days later, when applying for replacement Iranian travel documents at the passport office, Dr. Esfandiari was invited to an interview by a Ministry of Intelligence official, which began a series of interrogations that stretched over the next six weeks. Her interrogations took place at two different locations, sometimes continuing for as many as four days a week, sometimes stretching across seven and eight hours per day. Although Dr. Esfandiari returned to her mother's house every evening, the interrogations - which totaled more than 50 hours - were unpleasant and not without intimidation and threat.

-- The questioning focused on the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. Dr. Esfandiari answered all questions; when she could not recall the details of programs stretching back five and even eight years, the staff at the Wilson Center provided her with this information. According to the Wilson Center, all of their activities are on the public record, and the interrogators could have obtained virtually all of the information they sought through the Wilson Center website (www.wilsoncenter.org) and through Wilson Center publications. Repeatedly during the interrogations, Dr. Esfandiari was pressured to make "confessions" or to implicate the Wilson Center in activities in which it had no part, which she refused to do.

-- The interrogations stopped on February 14. Except for one threatening phone call on February 17, Dr. Esfandiari heard nothing from her interrogators for the next 10 weeks, until receiving another phone call in early May asking her to "cooperate." She interpreted this as another demand for a false confession, which she refused to give. On May 7, Iranian officials again summoned Dr. Esfandiari to the Ministry of Intelligence. When she arrived for her

appointment on May 8, officials put her into a car and took her to Evin Prison, where she was allowed one phone call to her mother.

-- This harassment of a 67-year old U.S. citizen and well-respected scholar in both Iran and the United States is unwarranted. Dr. Esfandiari has been prevented from seeing her doctors in the United States by the withholding of her passport for the past four and a half months, and by her more recent incarceration in Evin prison. Despite numerous efforts since December 30 to secure permission for her to leave Iran, Dr. Esfandiari has been unable to obtain any assistance from the Iranian government, which has not made formal charges against her.

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